

the articles in the Flowers chapter are facsimiles of those originally published in *Wildlife*, *Australian Plants*, and the *West Australian*, beautifully illustrated with the author's wildflower drawings.

This book, as well as giving insights into the development of a famous naturalist in Western Australia, also contains references

to many Victorians associated with the FNCV. Both are good reasons to read it. A wealth of line drawings and coloured plates accompany the text.

Ian Endersby

56 Looker Road,  
Montmorency, Victoria 3094

## The Big Twitch

by Sean Dooley

Publisher: *Allen and Unwin, Sydney*,  
2005. 322 pages, paperback.  
ISBN 1741145287. RRP \$26.95

When asked to write a review for Sean Dooley's book *The Big Twitch* I was surprised, a little taken back even. You see, I appear to have developed a, largely undeserved (I think), reputation for being anti-twitcher. Still, I don't generally have a great deal of time for hard-core twitchers. I recently saw a good twitcher described as 'opinionated, aggressive, passionate, single-minded and distrustful'. Mind you, some people would say this could also describe me.

Anyway, not being one to pre-judge, I immersed myself in *The Big Twitch*, a story about one man's effort to set a new record for the number of bird species seen in Australia, and its territories, in one year. Well, it was more than set a new record; the previous highest total seen in a year was 633, the real goal was to see 700 species, a feat that very few birdwatchers achieve in a lifetime. Given that there are supposedly 695 bird species that are resident or regular migrants to Australia it is perhaps not surprising that many thought this was little more than an unachievable whim by a virtual unknown, at least outside Melbourne, who had an inheritance burning a hole in his pocket. Now, all of this is very unfair but first impressions being what they are ...

I guess I approached the book having a good idea of the premise behind the concept, and even much of the content. A quick explanation: in January 2002 Sean



posted a message on the internet birdwatching discussion group Birding-Aus stating his intention to embark on this ambitious adventure. This was a bold move as it exposed Dooley and his intentions to all manner of scrutiny. In the year that followed there were regular updates on progress posted to Birding-Aus. The book essentially builds on these running commentaries.

Regardless of what one may think about twitchers or even the apparent folly of the exercise you can't escape the fact that the resulting book is an enormously entertaining read.

Birdwatchers, the converted, will enjoy the book. They may know many of the people mentioned, have been to the places described, or would like to visit them, and experienced many of the birds mentioned.

However, the book is clearly written for the general reader rather than the keen birder – they are, after all, a much larger market. The initial Birding-Aus postings of 2002 were written for an audience that understood what he was doing, while the book seeks to explain why anybody would have such a passion. I believe the book achieves this aim admirably.

My recommendation? Buy the book by all means. Dooley definitely needs the royalties now that he has squandered the family fortune. If you are a serious birder how-

ever, go back to the postings in the Birding-Aus archives. It is there that you will find the raw passion, the determination to succeed, the despondency that comes with dips, and the unalloyed pleasure of finding that long-sought-for species.

Congratulations Sean on producing such an enjoyable book.

**David Geering**

Regent Honeyeater Recovery Coordinator  
Department of Environment & Conservation  
PO Box 2111, Dubbo NSW 2830

## Snakes, Lizards and Frogs of the Victorian Mallee

by Michael Swan and  
Simon Watharow

(illustrations by Rachael Hammond)

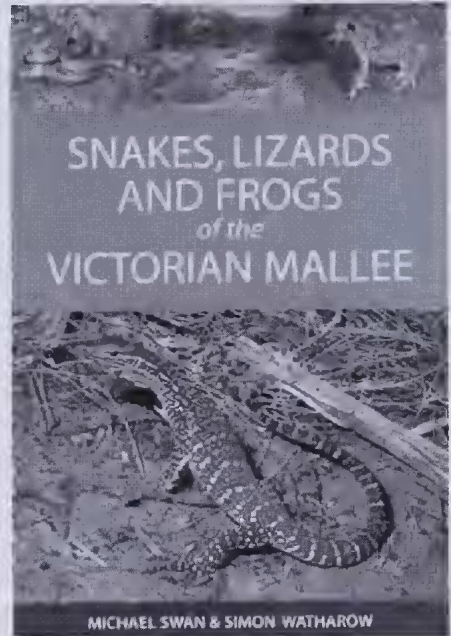
Publisher: *CSIRO Publishing, 2005.*

*91 pages, paperback;*

*ISBN 0643091343. RRP \$29.95*

Most of us are probably aware that the Victorian Mallee is endowed with an abundance of reptiles. Those of us lucky enough to venture into this area at the right time of year have probably seen a Bearded Dragon basking on a fencepost, a Stumpy-tailed Lizard strolling across a track or a Brown Snake melting into the undergrowth. We are perhaps less aware that three species of frogs occur in true Mallee habitat (spending much of their lives aestivating underground), and several others occur in aquatic habitats that penetrate or delimit this region. The sheer diversity of reptiles and frogs in the Mallee make it a rewarding destination for herpetologists, and an interesting diversion for those who might be enjoying the springtime wildflowers. These animals are showcased in a new fieldguide, *Snakes, Lizards and Frogs of the Victorian Mallee*.

The book commences with a foreword by John Coventry, Emeritus Curator of Herpetology, Museum Victoria, and a person with a long association with the her-



petofauna of the Mallee. John provides a neat summary of the reason for the herpetological diversity of the Victorian Mallee – it is a transitional zone between the mesic Bassian zoogeographic region of south-eastern Australia and xeric Eyrean zoogeographic region. This means that the fauna of the Mallee has representatives from both zoogeographic regions, and is further enriched by the intrusion of the Murray-Darling river system, which delivers some species from the Torresian zoogeographic region. The result of this confluence of faunas is the wonderful herpetological richness of the Mallee.